

The NAFL – It isn't what you think it is

by Darryl Gross and Dan Torretta – 8/5/20



In the short time since the NAFL was announced there has been a lot of buzz in the floorball community. We've seen a lot of discussion over Facebook and there's been a great deal of international attention. This is well deserved. To try to launch the first legitimate high level floorball competition in the US is no small feat and should be talked about as much as possible.

DISCLAIMER: Everything written here represents our opinions and ideas. We do not speak for the NAFL.

Unfortunately many details have not been released which has led many people to fill in the blanks with their own theories. We believe some of the discussion has become misguided and is a bit off the mark. For one, there seems to be this idea that the existing floorball markets are going to be where the teams are located (or at least in proximity). We don't think it will follow that pattern exactly. This is a whole new chapter for US floorball which means new markets and new strategies.

Existing players seem worried about how they'll travel for the season. There is concern that an official league won't have enough players to fill out a 20-person roster. For 90% of the existing players that are reading this, we need to put it bluntly, "you're not the target players for this league". For as long as we've been involved with Floorball in the United States (12 years and counting), we've focused on floorball as a participation sport. It's a game for EVERYBODY that can be played anywhere. All the focus has been on inclusivity and growing the player base. While growing the game is still the ultimate objective, the purpose of the NAFL is more than just getting people to play. The League is focused on introducing the game to North America as a spectator sport. That means getting as much talent as we can from anywhere in the world. We want the average person to watch these games and get excited to see how fast the game really is. Of course anyone should be encouraged to try out for a team, but anyone who has seen or played internationally knows how far behind we are to the rest of the world. Our best players are bench warmers anywhere in Europe. **To be clear, it is the individual owners who will be free fill their rosters with any players they choose (subject to overall league restrictions).**

If you've been around floorball for any length of time, you know how exciting this game can be. If you've been to an international tournament or watched the WFC on IFF YouTube, you know how fast the ball moves and can appreciate the skills of the players. The crowds are always raucous. If you've attended U.S. Nationals or seen a WFC qualifier in this country, you've gotten a small taste of floorball at a high level. Watching North Texas battle Menlo or Chicago gives you an appreciation of what the game offers. Now imagine that EVERY game in the NAFL series is faster and more exciting. That's what we're talking about.

So what does that mean for the role of the existing floorball community? Easy, hype the hell out of this thing. Just because there's a new, higher skill league coming doesn't mean we need to view this as a threat. It's a huge benefit for us all. We can continue to enjoy our pickup sessions and local amateur leagues while the big dogs compete in their separate league. The more successful NAFL becomes, the more interest there will be in floorball as a sport. That means more people at your pickups and more opportunities for local leagues. This will raise the overall level of play and help us develop the pipeline

of skilled young players so that in the future, North American teams will be able to rank high on the world stage.

If a team is announced in your area, get involved in any way you can. Become the first diehard fan of your local franchise. Spread the word, buy merch, travel with the team to watch the games. The owners getting into this might not know a great deal about floorball. If they see that they already have a group of 50 fans in Dallas, Austin, Minneapolis, etc., it will only encourage them to keep trying to get their team off the ground. Let's make these games noisy and fun to be a part of. This is our opportunity to show the rest of the country what we already know.

There are many unanswered questions. The League will be releasing more details and answering these questions over the next weeks and months. The latest answers can be found on the NAFL Frequently Asked Questions page <https://nafloorball.com/faq/>. We know that teams can roster as many as 30 players with at least 25% residing in the United States or Canada. The League season is compressed into a 5-week period. This is by design. A great deal of thought and discussion has gone into the development of the league structure and format. We don't yet know exactly how many teams and where they will be located. That will be determined by the team owners.

Once the NAFL begins play, other questions will come up that have nothing to do with the League directly. For example, "What does this do for tournaments in the US?" "Will the Texas Open and Golden Gate Cup now have semi-pro teams competing?" "Will the NAFL teams even care about our amateur tournaments?" US Nationals already has rules in place for teams bringing in more than two non-resident players, but now might have to make rules about amateur vs paid players.

These are good questions and good problems to have. Everyone in our community wants to see floorball grow. Now we're seeing it. Admittedly, this is a much bigger leap than anything we were expecting – especially with today's COVID-19 concerns. It's a testament to the foresight of people in the floorball world. **This is a huge opportunity for floorball in North America.** Now that the wheels are in motion, we can't wait to see where this takes our favorite sport.